

The Huntsville Comprehensive Plan: Part II

By Mickey S. Evans

April 19, 2006

At the regular meeting on April 18, 2006 the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Committee (CPAC) unanimously recommended to the City Council that the scope of work be approved and the City Manager be authorized to enter into a contract with Lane Kendig, Inc., (LKI) to provide professional services to assist the City of Huntsville in developing a comprehensive plan and economic development plan in an amount of \$153,120 and to create a contingency fund of \$19,380 from budgeted and other economic development funds. The council voted approval with a unanimous vote.

The \$153,120 includes \$19,920 for Task 1 (Discovery & Reconnaissance); \$15,880 for Task 2 (Community Visioning); \$19,040 for Task 3 (Land Use & Character); \$11,400 for Task 4 (Transportation); \$15,960 for Task 5 (Growth Capacity); \$10,800 for Task 6 (Parks & Recreation); \$37,500 for Task 7 (Economic Development); \$15,080 for Task 8 (Implementation); \$1,398 in travel expenses; and \$6,142 in direct expenses.

The Fiscal Year 2006 budget earmarked \$165,000 for the project by transferring \$72,600 from water; \$46,200 from wastewater; \$8,250 from solid waste; and \$37,950 from the sidewalk capital improvement project General Fund (CIP).

The amount of money in sidewalks was determined to be insufficient to construct any significant length of sidewalks in any high priority location. The council will consider reestablishing the sidewalk CIP fund during the next budget cycle.

The transfers from the other three funds were judged appropriate since The Huntsville Comprehensive Plan (THCP) will benefit the entire city and all programs, to include water, wastewater and solid waste. The transfer of those funds does not adversely impact the minimum reserve levels established by council for those funds and does not change any of our current city utility rates.

Thus, the contract for \$153,120 was less than the \$165,000 budgeted by \$11,880. Per the recommendation of the CPAC, the council recently transferred \$7,500 from the general fund for economic development activities to the comprehensive plan project to increase the \$11,880 reserve to \$19,380. This reserve may be used to fund any internal administrative costs such soliciting and supporting public participation.

In my opinion, this is the most important project undertaken by the City of Huntsville in many years. It is worth every penny and will, when developed and implemented, assist councilmembers, advisory boards and commissions, staff and citizens in managing our future needs by knowing what those needs are, establishing goals and objectives, setting priorities and managing our public resources over the next 20 years. I am confident that the vast majority of reasonable and responsible citizens will embrace this great opportunity to make a significant difference in the future of our city.

This project is intended to be transparent, inclusive, far-reaching and fully utilized over the short, intermediate and long term development of our city services and the city as a whole. It is so important that we have chosen a professional consultant to assist us.

LKI is a highly qualified and experienced firm that has facilitated comprehensive planning programs for over 80 communities throughout Texas and the U.S. LKI Vice President Bret Keast has assisted Angleton, Bastrop, Baytown, Kerrville, Nacogdoches, Schertz and Webster with their comprehensive planning programs. They are also currently assisting Del Rio, Texas.

We have a great city staff. This project, however, far exceeds the available manpower of our planning staff. Moreover, the need to produce a quality plan that we will indeed use as the primary reference document for not only planning but building our future is essential. Any suggestion that a quality comprehensive plan can simply be “whipped together” in “over the rainbow” fashion is simply nutty.

The consultants with LKI and TIP Strategies, Inc. will indeed collect information from the city staff. They will also harvest the thoughts and feelings of our citizens, institutions, organizations, groups and other governmental agencies to develop their conclusions and recommendations about our community strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats that we should consider in planning our future.

LKI and TIP will bring fresh eyes, ears and other senses to Huntsville to really see, hear and understand things those of us who live here no longer appreciate because we simply take them for granted. I am counting on our consultants to help refocus all of us as we think about who we are, what we are, where we want to go, how we get there, how much it will cost to get there and if we are willing to pay the price to get there.

This project is intended to involve the public more than any I am aware of over the past 10 years in Huntsville. Public process, however, can be time-consuming, messy, maddening and unpredictable. It is, however, absolutely essential in a project such as this.

In her book, *Designing Public Consensus*, Barbara Faga notes that: “The public is smart and involved. They know what they want, and if you can give them enough information so they truly understand the issues, they will come up with the right solution. All the while you must be open to change and scrupulously transparent with the process.”

One of the key and essential goals of the council is to give our fellow citizens as much information as we can so that we all truly understand the issues that we face in the future and appreciate that many of them must be addressed beginning now, not later.

Many of them may require expensive solutions and we must lay them out over time so that we can deal with them reasonably, responsibly and responsively. I believe that to do otherwise is a dereliction of our duties on council at the present time and grossly unfair to subsequent councilmembers who may be forced to face extreme consequences in the future because of our procrastination and lack of public courage in the present.

Now is the time for all good Huntsville citizens to come to the aid of our city and help make it all it can and should be by involving ourselves in the development and implementation of The Huntsville Comprehensive Plan.